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ABSTRACT

This study sought to identify and describe the components of a model preschool program that recognizes multicultural diversity. A non-participant observation was conducted in an early childhood center identified by the Ohio Department of Education as having a model program. The center's six classrooms were observed and rated according to criteria developed from "Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children" (1989). The observation form addressed three areas of multicultural diversity: the visual or aesthetic environment, toys and materials, and interactions. In each area, observers were asked to check whether various characteristics were observed. The study found that while each of the classrooms demonstrated mixed performance in the areas of visual or aesthetic environment and toys and materials, all classrooms demonstrated all of the characteristics in the area of interactions. The results suggest that human interactions are the most important component of a multicultural preschool program. A copy of the observation form and the results for each program characteristic are appended. Contains nine references. (MDM)

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Components of a Model Preschool Program which Recognizes Multicultural Diversity

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Running head: COMPONENTS OF A MODEL PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe components of a model preschool program which recognizes multicultural diversity. A non-participant observation was conducted in an early childhood center that was identified as a model preschool program through the Ohio Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Education. The center contained six classrooms which served children ages three to five years of age. An observation form selected by the observers outlining three key components of multicultural education: 1.) visual/aesthetic, 2.) toys and materials, and 3.) interactions, was used to record information in each of the six classrooms. A table was constructed to summarize the results of the characteristics seen in each of the six classrooms. It was concluded that each of the six classrooms demonstrated some of the characteristics under each of the three components on the observation form; however, all six classrooms demonstrated all of the characteristics under the component titled interactions.

Components of a Model Preschool Program which Recognizes Multicultural Diversity in a Natural Context Environment

According to the 1990 Census report of sex, race, and hispanic origin, 25% of all individuals identified are of minority status in the United States. America is becoming a global community and our school's are feeling the impact of this pluralism. In no other segment of society is the challenge to balance the human diversity more evident than in the public schools (Sklarz, 1993). Human diversity not only includes race, but also gender, exceptionality, and individual differences. Pressure from the diversity in the general population of individuals in the United States has heightened school's awareness to include multicultural education. This includes all aspects of human diversity as part of children's education. Education that is multicultural can be interpreted as extending the knowledge of all students concerning the similarities and differences among and within cultural groups (Valencia, 1992). It means teaching children to respect what is unique about themselves and others. "Culture"

consists of all the people, objects, and events that impact meaning to our lives (Williams, 1989). Children discover their identities as important individuals, capable learners, and problem solvers from their own combinations of meaningful experiences.

Research that has been completed on the impact of racism on children's identity development shows that damage can be done to all children regardless of their cultural background. Kutner (1985), found that racial prejudice in young children affects their ability to reason and distorts their judgement and perception of reality.

According to Stacey York (1991), there are two purposes of multicultural education. The first purpose is to provide a strategy to prevent and eliminate the development of prejudice and racism in children. Children are most sensitive to learning about trust, acceptance and respect during the first nine years of their life. The second purpose is to teach children to live cooperatively with people who are different from themselves. As early as age three children are able to use several roles to classify themselves and others (Van

Parys, 1981). Swadner (1988) identified that preschool children internalize and demonstrate a number of socially important behavioral roles including gender, age and race.

Multicultural education in the preschool years is important for a variety of reasons: 1) it encourages a true sense of self, 2) it promotes development, 3) it prepares children for the future, 4) it prevents isolation, 5) it discourages denial and fear of differences, and 6) it cultivates acceptance (York, 1991). Understanding the importance of multicultural education obligates schools and teachers to make a commitment to provide these experiences for preschool children.

With the passage of Public Law 99-457, the Ohio Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Education, created the Statewide Preschool Special Education Service Delivery Project. The project identified five Ohio model preschool programs which included multicultural education as a component for being recognized as a model program.

Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to identify and describe the components of a model preschool program which recognizes multicultural diversity.

Method

Subjects

The subject for this case study was a public school early childhood center in Northwest Ohio, that was identified as a model preschool program by the Ohio Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Education. The center consisted of six classrooms which served children ages three to five in morning and afternoon sessions. Five of the six classrooms consisted of children with special needs and typically developing peers models. The sixth classroom was a self contained classroom for multi-handicapped children.

Materials

An observation form was composed from information obtained

from the Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children. The observation form contained three major areas: visual/aesthetic environment, toys and materials, and interactions. Each area was further described by specific items that were to be marked as being seen in the center, not present in the center or unclear (Appendix A).

Procedures

The observation was made in a public school early childhood center which contained six model preschool classrooms. The observers were non-participants in each of the classrooms observed. The data recorded was observed in a naturalistic setting. On the observation form (see appendix 1-A) the observers marked 1 if the characteristics were seen on the day of the observation, 2 if the characteristics were not present in the classroom, or 3 if it was unclear if the characteristic was present.

The information obtained from the observation was intended to look at the characteristics of each of the three areas (visual/aesthetic environment, toys and materials, and interactions),

to determine the importance of each in identifying multicultural components in a model preschool classroom.

Results

Table 1 presents the frequency of occurrence of the 28 potential characteristics of multicultural education as observed in the six classrooms. These characteristics were subdivided into three areas: 1) visual/aesthetic (8 characteristics), 2) toys and materials (13 characteristics), and 3) interactions (7 characteristics). The frequencies were calculated into percentages of characteristics seen in all six classrooms.

Place Table 1 here

In the visual/aesthetic section, the displaying of pictures of children in the classrooms was rated 100%, indicating this characteristic was important in all six classrooms. Almost as important was the displaying of pictures of program staff, which was

rated 93%. Four characteristics were rated 17% which were related to displaying of pictures of human diversity. Two characteristics involving family and community diversity were rated 0%, indicating no importance in the classrooms.

In the toys and materials section, three characteristics received ratings of 100%. These characteristics dealt with materials that are commonly used by children in preschool classrooms (dolls, mirrors, art materials). Three characteristics received ratings of 50%, all of which related to language and literacy. Two characteristics received ratings of 17%, which related to hearing and reading about different cultures and languages. Five characteristics received 0% ratings indicating no importance in the classrooms. Three of the five characteristics rated 0% pertained to the use of various types of multicultural dolls in the classroom. Two of the other characteristics related to books indicating differences in cultural and social levels.

In the interactions section, all of the seven characteristics

received ratings of 100%, indicating that all of the seven characteristics were important in all of the six classrooms. This area identified areas involving teacher/student and student/student, direct and non-direct interactions.

Discussion

The information obtained from Table 1 identified interactions as being the most important component of a model classroom which recognizes multicultural awareness. The overall percentage rating was 100% in all characteristics. The interactions in the classroom focus on the teacher as the facilitator of all types of interactions in the classroom. He or she promotes a multicultural environment by the way students are allowed to interact with others in the classroom and acquire information regarding human diversity. The average of the characteristics seen for toys and materials was 37.2%.

This percentage was calculated by taking the total percentage of all characteristics seen and dividing by the number of characteristics in

the toys and materials section. This section was identified as the second most important component. The average of the characteristics seen for the visual/aesthetic environment was 32.6%. The same procedure was used to calculate the average percentage in the visual/aesthetic section. This area was identified as the third most important component.

It is the interpretation of the observers using the information obtained from Table 1, that the real experiences, which include the daily interactions, are most important in creating an environment for preschool children that recognizes multicultural diversity. Toys and materials, and the visual/aesthetic displays will help children generalize the importance of multicultural diversity, but preschool children need to have the real interactions first before they can understand the concept of multicultural diversity through materials and aesthetics used in the classroom.

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Appendix A

MULTICULTURAL DIVERSITY OBSERVATION FORM

Location	Date	Observer

The following guidelines have been adapted from the *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children*, by Louise Derman-Sparks and the A.B.C. Task Force (1990).

Key: Y (yes) N (no) N/O (not observed)

Visual/Aesthetic Environment

1.) Pictures of all children in the program are displayed throughout the classroom. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

2.) Pictures of staff in the program are displayed throughout the classroom. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

3.) Pictures/Posters of major racial/ethnic groups are displayed throughout the classroom. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

4.) Pictures/Posters numerically balanced showing men and women doing jobs in the home and outside the home. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

5.) Pictures/Posters showing elderly people of different backgrounds doing various activities. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

6.) Pictures/Posters of handicapped individuals doing a variety of activities (work and recreational). **Y N N/O**
Comment:

7.) Pictures/Posters showing diversity in family styles. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

8.) Art work displayed that reflects various cultures represented in the classroom or community. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

Toys and Materials

1.) Books reflect the diversity of gender roles, racial and cultural backgrounds, special needs, a wide range of occupations, and age ranges. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

2.) Books present accurate information (not stereotypic) regarding ethnic and cultural backgrounds. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

3.) Books reflect various family life styles and incomes. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

4.) Books reflect people from all groups living their daily lives as well as having celebrations. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

5.) Books reflect different languages. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

6.) The classroom environment provides opportunities for the children to see and hear various languages (including sign and Braille). **Y N N/O**
Comment:

7.) Music heard reflects various culture styles of the children and staff as well as other groups in the United States. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

8.) Art materials include various skin colors (paint, crayons, playdoh). **Y N N/O**
Comment:

9.) Mirrors are available for children to check out their physical features. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

10.) Dolls represent a fair balance of all the major groups in the United States. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

11.) There is a balance of male and female dolls with a variety of clothes. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

12.) There is a selection of bought and homemade dolls with different kinds of disabilities. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

13.) Manipulative materials depict diversity in race, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities and occupations. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

Interactions

1.) Teachers/caregivers pick up on nonverbal and verbal expression of interest equally between boys and girls, special needs and non handicapped, and children of color. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

2.) Teachers/caregivers equally offer all children in the program physical freedom of large-motor equipment. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

3.) Teachers/caregivers allow opportunities for special need children to interact actively and independently with materials and other children. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

4.) Teachers/caregivers respond equally to similar behaviors of all children. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

5.) Teachers/caregivers facilitate and support childrens' explorations and interests of others (skin color, hair textures).
Y N N/O
Comment:

6.) Teachers/caregivers give accurate information to children regarding disabilities, gender, etc. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

7.) All children are supported in their preferred learning styles and also encouraged to try new ways of interacting with people and materials. **Y N N/O**
Comment:

Table 1

Characteristics Observed in Six Classrooms of a Model, Multicultural-Diversity School

Characteristics	Number of the Six Classes in Which Characteristic was Seen	Not Present	Unclear	% Seen
Visual/Aesthetic Environment				
1. Pictures of Program's Children	6	0	0	100%
2. Pictures of Program Staff	5	1	0	93%
3. Pictures: Major Ethnic/Racial Groups	1	5	0	17%
4. Pictures: Men/Women doing Home and Outside Home Jobs	1	5	0	17%
5. Pictures/Posters: Elderly of Different Backgrounds	1	5	0	17%
6. Pictures: Handicapped -- Work and Recreational	1	5	0	17%
7. Pictures: Diversity of Family Styles	0	6	0	0%
8. Art Reflecting Various Community Cultures	0	6	0	0%
Toys and Materials				
1. Books: Diverse Roles	3	0	3	50%
2. Books: Nonstereotypic re: Backgrounds	3	0	3	50%
3. Books: Various Styles, Incomes	0	6	0	0%
4. Books: All Groups -- Lives and Celebrations	0	6	0	0%
5. Books: Different Languages	1	5	0	17%
6. Hear/See: Different Languages	3	3	0	50%
7. Music: Various Cultural Styles	1	0	5	17%
8. Art Materials: Various Skin Colors	6	0	0	100%
9. Mirrors Available	6	0	0	100%
10. Dolls: Major U.S. Groups	0	6	0	0%

Characteristics	Number of the Six Classes in Which Characteristic was Seen	Not Present	Unclear	% Seen
11. Dolls: Balance -- Male-Female Clothing	0	6	0	0%
12. Dolls: Different Disabilities	0	6	0	0%
13. Manipulatives: Diverse Races, Cultures, Physical Abilities, Jobs	6	0	0	100%
Interactions				
1. Teachers Identify Interests for All Types of Students	6	0	0	100%
2. All Students Offered Freedom of Large-Motor Equipment	6	0	0	100%
3. All Allowed Active Interaction	6	0	0	100
4. Similar Responses to Similar Behaviors	6	0	0	100
5. Facilitation and Support of Interests in Others (Differences)	6	0	0	100%
6. Accurate Information Regarding Gender, Disabilities, etc.	6	0	0	100%
7. Support for Preferred Learning Styles AND Encouragement for New Ways of Interacting	6	0	0	100%

Notes:

1. A complete version of the observation form is presented in the Appendix.
2. The form was adapted from the Anti-Bias Curriculum by Louise Derman-Sparks (1990).

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